

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Rising numbers of road crash

Stop the epidemic

WITHIN the span of a few hours, two pile ups and four crashes on and around Bangabandhu Bridge claimed the lives of six people, and left 50 more injured on Saturday. Unfortunately, such untimely deaths in road mishaps, particularly on highways, have become a regular phenomenon. According to a recently published report by the Bangladesh Passengers' Welfare Association, at least 8,642 people were killed and 21,855 injured in road accidents across the country last year alone. Of the injured, 1,305 became permanently disabled. The statistics are alarming, but what is even more worrying is how little has been done over the years to address the epidemic. Lack of systematic intervention, which has destroyed the lives of tens of thousands over the years, continues to put our lives at risk.

We have repeatedly highlighted the importance of ending the culture of impunity that protects reckless drivers, many of whom operate with faulty or expired licenses. The traffic police department needs to play a more effective role in identifying overloaded and unfit vehicles, and holding drunk and reckless drivers accountable.

With a majority of those killed in accidents being breadwinners for their families, it is imperative that we institute an accessible legal framework through which victims and their families can press for compensation from drivers responsible for the accidents and/or owners who employ such drivers.

We agree with the recommendations of the association, particularly that we involve the media to raise public awareness on traffic rules, construct separate lanes for slow-moving vehicles on highways and set up trauma centres near highways to provide immediate care to accident victims.

Brick kilns king among air pollutants

Enforce the law and adopt new technologies

VERY few of the brick kilns in Bangladesh - approximately 7,000, according to government estimates -- have been constructed following proper design and environmental rules, according to experts. And the consequences have been devastating as brick kilns are the largest source of greenhouse gases in Bangladesh, so much so that the smoke spewed out by them has been identified as one of the main factors behind the worsening quality of air in the country.

It is incomprehensible how these illegal activities have been allowed to sprout under the very nose of the authorities who put the blame on influential and unscrupulous brickfield owners, many of whom are allegedly operating without the approval of concerned authorities including the Department of Environment. Law stipulates that no brickfield can be set up within three kilometres of a residential or agricultural area but the restriction is seldom followed by owners who operate by means of muscle power, according to media reports.

Much has been written on the impacts of unplanned and outdated brick kilns on human health, agriculture and environment, but it seems the government has done little to address the issue. The construction of kilns in violation of rules must be stopped immediately for sustainable development and the "Brick Making and Kiln Establishment (Control) Act 2013" should be amended and enforced to stop the use of topsoil for manufacturing bricks and providing for adoption of new technologies like silicate and concrete.



MACRO MIRROR
FAHMIDA KHATUN

however, does not guarantee food security unless food is distributed evenly among the poorest section of the country. Food security is a fundamental right of every citizen. Dr Mahabub Hossain, an eminent agricultural economist of Asia, believed in such a right. His objective was to find out ways to ensure the delivery of this fundamental right among the people of Bangladesh. He dedicated his life to understand and explain the dynamics of agricultural economy of Bangladesh, with the help of his in-depth knowledge acquired from their very roots.

My association with Dr Mahabub Hossain goes back to February 1989, when I joined the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) as a research associate. He had just assumed the position of the Director General of BIDS back then. Before that, during my university days, his work on microcredit and rural economy was referred to our class by our professors. So it was indeed a great opportunity to work with him at BIDS. I left for London to pursue higher studies in 1991, and when I returned to BIDS in 1996, Mahabub bhai had already left BIDS to work at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. He worked at IRRI for more than 15 years as economist and head of the Social Sciences Division.

His work on agrarian structure, land tenure system, rural non-farm activities, rural infrastructure, credit, food security and impact of technology on income distribution and poverty are widely acclaimed across South and Southeast Asia. He contributed immensely to the

development of strategy and medium term plan of the IRRI. When he returned from the Philippines and joined BRAC in 2007 as its executive director, my professional and social connection with him resumed. In 2015, he became a member of the Board of Trustees of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), which strengthened our bond.

He was not only a researcher but also a successful administrator. He stood out among his peers, progressively assuming

the reality on the ground. He would encourage his fellow researchers to do the same, as he felt that without going to the grassroots, one could not acquire a deep understanding of the real situation. Hence, my first assignment at BIDS was the evaluation of the microcredit programme in a few districts of Bangladesh that took me to those districts for the first time and opened my horizon of knowledge on the economic situation across Bangladesh. Under his

floods on agriculture, he would discuss the issues based on his own observations from the field. That is why it was indeed a challenge for others to speak in front of him. And that is why the policy prescriptions he made were realistic and effective.

An extremely hardworking, dedicated, disciplined, modest and kind person, Mahabub Hossain would start his day very early so that he could dedicate a couple of uninterrupted hours to finish his work. That he would get up at 3 am and write his research reports before he started his administrative work was a subject of much discussion at BIDS back then.

In recognition of his work, Mahabub Hossain received several honours at home and abroad. He was awarded the first Gold Medal by the Bangladesh Agricultural Economist Association in 1984. In 2013, he was selected as one of the 500 most powerful people in the world by *Foreign Policy* - a global magazine on politics and economics. Sadly, he did not receive any award from the government for his contribution towards the advancement of agriculture and rural economy in Bangladesh.

However, he didn't work for accolades. He was a person who loved to work relentlessly. His association with so many organisations in various capacities would say it all. He was involved with research organisations, private universities, non-government organisations, global networks and international organisations as an adviser and technical expert. He also supervised many PhD and Masters students, some of whom are now successful professionals in the country.

Dr Mahabub Hossain, died untimely on January 4, 2016 at the age of 71, while being treated for heart complications in the US. But he left behind his large volume of work and passion for the poor that will continue to inspire us forever.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.



Dr Mahabub Hossain dedicated his life to understand and explain the dynamics of the agricultural economy of Bangladesh.

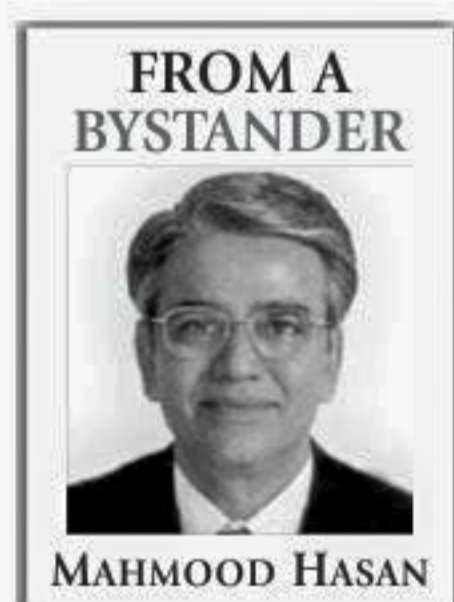
higher responsibility and ultimately becoming the DG of BIDS, when he was only in his early 40s. His work at both IRRI and BRAC was a combination of research and management, which he handled with equal competency. During his tenure at BRAC, he dedicated himself to achieving its mission of poverty reduction and women's empowerment, not only in Bangladesh, but in ten other countries in Asia and Africa. He could successfully transmit the experience of Bangladesh in these regions which have replicated similar programmes.

When many of us would struggle to demystify the trend and nature of economic data, Mahabub Hossain would go to the field and see for himself

supervision, I also worked on socio-economic conditions of slum dwellers for which my co-researchers and I visited slums and collected data ourselves. Needless to say, these trainings were invaluable in developing my outlook on economic research.

Dr Mahabub Hossain is unique on many accounts. He worked with a large volume of data. He analysed this data with his quantitative and qualitative analytical skills and prescribed policies based on his findings. His attitude towards using primary level data made him an economist with objective views. Each and every statement he made was based on his insights from the field. Be it rice production or the impact of

Will Pathankot derail Indo-Pak dialogue?



FROM A BYSTANDER
MAHMOOD HASAN

NO one had expected that the Modi-Sharif Lahore dialogue on December 25, 2015 would be challenged so soon. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, after returning from Pakistan, had actually warned the Lok Sabha about "spoilers", when she said, "We want to ensure that we are not provoked by saboteurs who want to stop the dialogue process". Evidently the militant attack at the airbase in Pathankot, Punjab on January 2, which left six militants and seven Indian soldiers dead, was designed to scuttle the Indo-Pak peace process.

The Indian media has persistently accused Pakistan for the attack on the airbase, as they reported that Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) was responsible for the assault. The Indian government has handed over some evidence and clues collected from the militants to Pakistan for investigation.

However, the Pakistani media reported that the United Jihad Council (UJC) rejected the Indian claim that the Pathankot attack was carried out by JeM - a banned outfit. Shaikh Jameelur Rehman, Secretary General of UJC said, "The attackers are a squad of mujahideens drawn from different member outfits of our alliance". UJC brings together over a dozen groups struggling to overthrow the Indian rule in Kashmir. "All attackers are local Kashmiris based in India-held Jammu and Kashmir. And they have been facilitated by local Hindu, Sikh and Muslim officers", Rehman said. He said the attackers were referred to as the "National Highway Squad".

Media plays a crucial role in moulding public opinion, which in turn plays a significant role in determining whether leaders should pursue a policy or abandon it. Mutual recriminations by the media of the two countries have made the situation murky. Public opinion in India has turned against Pakistan after the Pathankot attack, while Pakistan feels wrongly accused.

The Indian media also came out with scathing attacks on the way Indian armed forces handled the operation. Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar admitted to some "gaps" in the security at Pathankot while a bitter political debate is also going on in India on whether India should have any discussion with Pakistan at all.

The Indian media, including bloggers, that argue for the termination of talks with Pakistan asserts that this is important as Pakistan sends terrorists to harm and destabilise India. In fact, some argue that India should also carry out actions to destabilise Pakistan. What is at stake for Delhi that it has to engage Pakistan at a dialogue?

The rational elements say that the India - Pakistan confrontation is wasteful and has hindered progress in South Asia. Indian PM Narendra Modi's Lahore initiative must not go to waste because of terrorist attacks and India should try to strengthen their ties with Pakistan and work out a peace deal. They argue that talks can go ahead despite incidents of terrorism. Only meaningful dialogue with Pakistan can eliminate terrorism.

In a statement on January 2, the Pakistan Foreign

Office "condemned" the Pathankot incident and stated that it remained "committed to partner with India to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism". On January 5, Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif called Modi to express his grief and sorrow over the Pathankot incident. Expressing his anguish, Modi emphasised the need for Pakistan to take "firm and immediate" actions against the terrorists. Sharif promised "prompt and decisive" action against the perpetrators and has ordered a probe into the attack.

Welcoming Sharif's call to Modi, Indian officials said that they would wait and watch Pakistan's response before going ahead with the Foreign Secretary level talks scheduled for January 15, 2016. The ball is now in Pakistan's court, they said.

The Pathankot seize has raised the old question of whether Nawaz Sharif is in control of Pakistan's army. It is generally believed that Pakistan's powerful

resorted to proxy war tactics, supporting mujahideens to "liberate" Kashmir from India. India considers these mujahideens terrorists who have repeatedly attacked different targets in India.

The "Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue" agreed at Islamabad between Sushma Swaraj and Sartaj Aziz deals with two core issues - for Pakistan, it is the issue of Kashmir, while for India, it is the issue of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan. Clearly, after the Pathankot episode, India would only want to discuss about cross-border terrorism with Pakistan while it is unlikely that Pakistan would put the Kashmir issue on the backburner.

The intractable issue of Kashmir could actually be called the root cause of the Indo-Pak hostility. Kashmir has become a 'romantic' issue for both Pakistan and India; the narratives of the two countries over Kashmir is so deeply entrenched, it



Security personnel check IAF employees near the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot during the third day of the operations against militants.

SOURCE: PTI

military has its own agenda when it comes to dealing with India and Afghanistan, which may be at variance with the political leadership. This may be partly true, but it would be naive to think that Nawaz Sharif is not in control of Pakistan's power structure - which encompasses the military, the bureaucracy, civil society, religious establishments, opposition political parties, political ideology and strategic interests. Nawaz Sharif cannot be unaware of the deeds or misdeeds of any of its organs, including the army.

Unlike Sharif, Modi is free to take any initiative that he feels necessary in India's national interest. However, there are political risks for the Prime Minister if such initiatives fail, particularly when public opinion is hostile.

Cross-border terrorism, from Pakistan to India, is a by-product of the conflict over Kashmir. Since a direct war is not possible, Pakistan had earlier

appears there is practically very little chance for relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours to normalise.

Further, the recent developments in the Gulf region and Afghanistan could substantially harden both Indian and Pakistani perceptions regarding each other and may undermine the dialogue. The next SAARC Summit scheduled in Pakistan in September 2016 may then become a casualty of Indo-Pak confrontation.

If the Foreign Secretary level talks are held within the next few days, there is a chance that the dialogue will continue. If not, the situation would be playing into the hands of the militants. Modi and Sharif have to think outside the box to carry forward the dialogue.

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.

COMMENTS

"Users must be compensated for call drops: Tarana" (January 8, 2016)

Habib Schumon
We appreciate the move.

Lamin

We must be compensated for call drops. It's a good initiative.

"No rights issues approved in 2015" (January 7, 2016)

Muhammad Mustafa

Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has finally realised this but it is too late already. Still, I think, it's better late than never. IPOs with premium and Right Issues with or without premium have been the easiest ways for the issuer companies to amass illegal wealth under legal coverage. Raising money from the general public or ordinary shareholders by any company or corporate body must be highly restrictive.

"Truck bomb kills 65 at Libyan police training centre" (January 7, 2016)

Bimal Parui

Terror strikes everywhere; the world has become a dangerous place to live in.